

The President's Daily Brief

26 February 1969

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I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

MIDDLE EAST

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EUROPE

Luxembourg Foreign Minister Thorn, who has been seeing a lot of the French recently, has his own ideas about the genesis of the "Soames affair." Thorn says both Debr  and State Secretary Lipkowski had been trying for months to persuade De Gaulle that unless he made some new initiative, the British would be in the Common Market "on their own terms" in 1974. The two allegedly urged the General to make a proposition which would be aimed at attaching the British to one of several "trading communities" while preserving their exclusion from the Common Market. Thorn sees De Gaulle's pitch to Soames as a sign that the French President accepted this advice.

This is not necessarily inconsistent with Ambassador Shriver's view that concern about West German resurgence is what

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motivated De Gaulle. What seems clear is that for a combination of reasons--including recent trends in the European Communities as well as the French decline vis-a-vis West Germany--De Gaulle felt he was losing the initiative and was becoming increasingly isolated.

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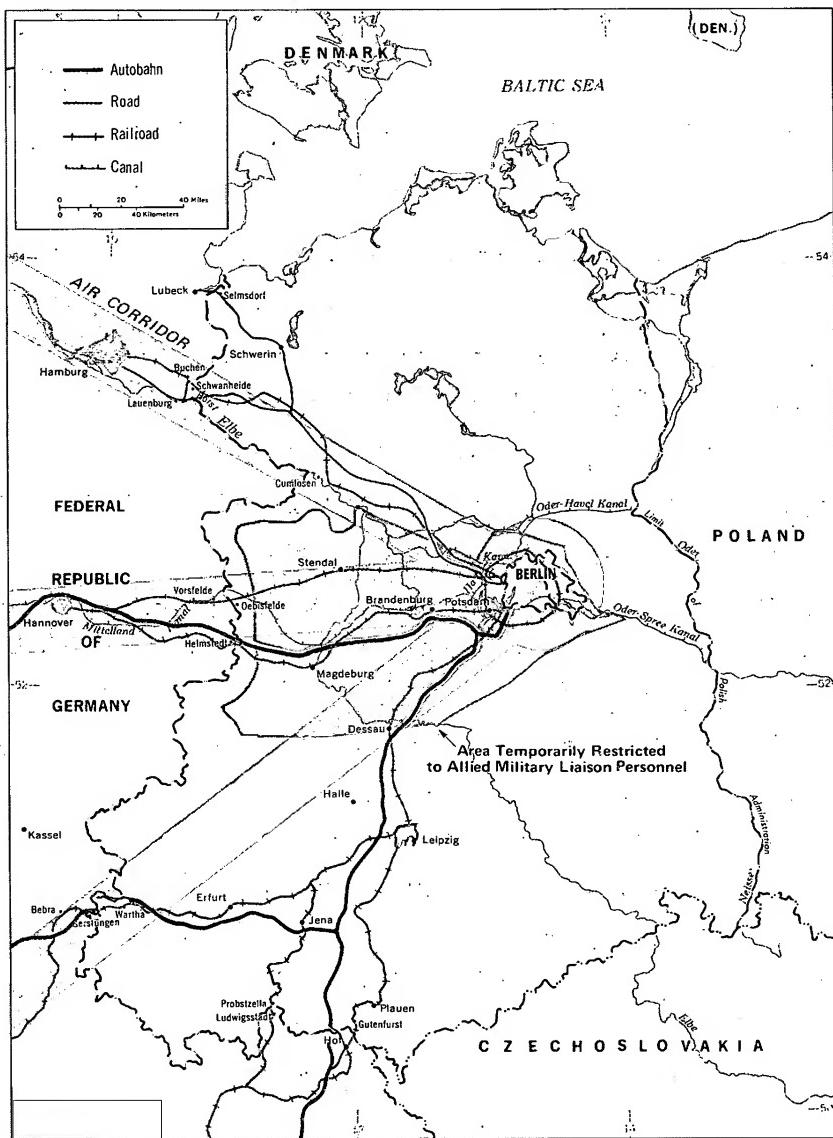
A German foreign official tried a new tack last weekend in discussing the nonproliferation treaty with US officials. The conversation apparently reflected a West German effort to develop an interpretation of the treaty which preserves the possibility of a European nuclear force. To do this the Germans have to get around Article 1, which binds the signatories not to transfer nuclear weapons to other countries.

The official made it clear that the Germans had no intention of proposing a European nuclear defense system, but he observed that Bonn does not consider such a system inconsistent with the treaty, Article 1 notwithstanding. He suggested that Article 10, which recognizes that the signatories may in "extraordinary circumstances affecting their security" take actions otherwise prohibited by the treaty, might be used to justify a collective deterrent even under present circumstances.

The Germans do not expect US approval of this position during President Nixon's visit, but they are certain to bring the subject up.

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ACCESS ROUTES TO BERLIN



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SOVIET AFFAIRS

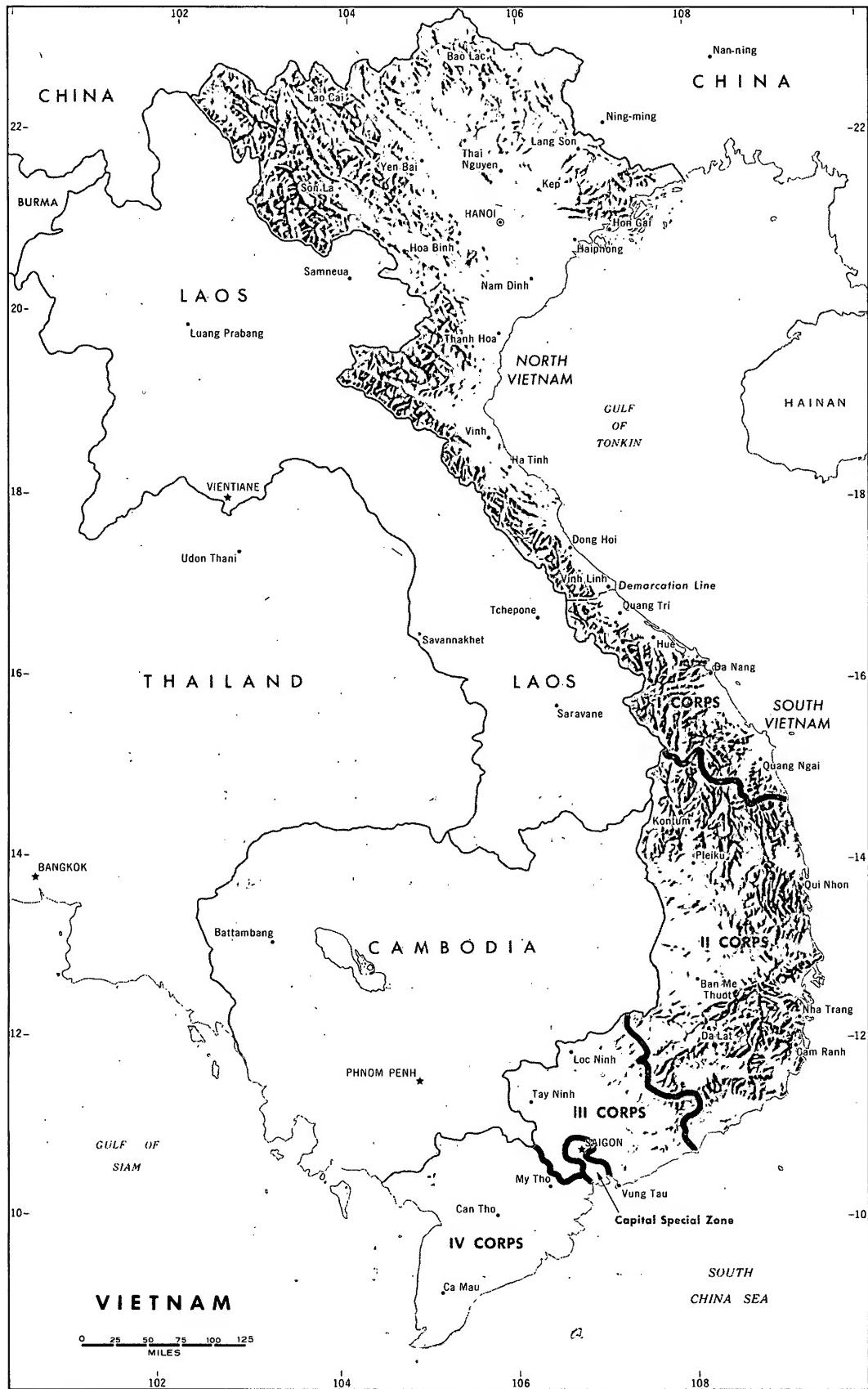
West Berlin and East German authorities have agreed to meet on 26 February in East Berlin to discuss the question of the presidential election. At the same time, East Germany has publicly reiterated its position that it is willing to negotiate an Easter pass agreement only if the West Germans find a new site for their presidential election. A prominent West Berlin Senat official has told the US mission that if the East Germans are not prepared to go beyond the offer of wall passes at Easter, there can be no basis for serious negotiations.

Meanwhile the commander-in-chief of Soviet forces in East Germany has imposed temporary restrictions on the travel of Allied military mission observers during the period 24 February - 10 March. The restrictions apply to the area north, south and west of Berlin extending to the West German border. The Berlin-Helmstedt autobahn normally used by Allied personnel in West Germany when traveling to Berlin is not included in the ban. The restrictions are probably intended to cover the announced Warsaw Pact exercise and to provide an opportunity for harassing tactics if the election is held as scheduled.

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The young man who set himself on fire in Prague's Wenceslaus Square yesterday may have been trying to dramatize the anniversary of the 1948 Communist coup in Czechoslovakia. The suicide, however, is likely neither to generate public disturbances nor to precipitate a political crisis as the population has been more or less numbed by over 30 self-immolation attempts since Jan Palach burned himself last month.

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VIETNAM

The shape of the enemy's current offensive remains basically unchanged after more than three days of action, although its pace has slackened somewhat. The Communists are continuing to emphasize widespread but generally light rocket and mortar attacks--occasionally accompanied by limited ground probes--against province and district capitals and allied military bases.

Saigon and its environs remained free of enemy activity during 24-25 February; the same was true of Hue. At Da Nang, however, there has been some ground fighting on the outskirts, and the infiltration of weapons and sappers into the city is reported to be continuing.

* * *

Thieu's assessment of Communist plans and capabilities as given to Ambassador Bunker on 24 February was that we can expect more shellings, harassment, and probably some ground attacks in a few areas. He said that the pacification effort in the country had been checked only in a limited way so far. He admitted, however, that with his military commanders pre-occupied with the enemy offensive, there would be some loss of momentum in the pacification effort.

In general, Thieu was in a buoyant mood and pleased with the way his forces and the people of South Vietnam were responding to the Communist attacks. He said there has been no rushing back into the urban centers by the people as happened last year. It was Thieu's impression that the Communists are

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having trouble coordinating their offensive and that our spoiling operations and the uncovering of large caches of material had neutralized the enemy's ability to move large units into action.

Thieu's preliminary assessment may be somewhat optimistic, however. Although it is correct that the enemy has scored few tactical successes so far, he has demonstrated again the continued viability of the Communist military machine throughout South Vietnam. Moreover, the generally limited nature of the offensive to date has left the Communists with a number of options, including the commitment of regular combat forces which have thus far been held in reserve. In addition, the extent of Communist gains in rural areas cannot yet be assessed; in one instance, somewhat at variance with Thi 's statements, continued pressure has forced the relocation of more than 5,000 persons to the provincial capital of Song Be in III Corps.

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Thieu also told Ambassador Bunker that he had instructed Ky to take along Ambassador Lam when Ky meets with President Nixon in Paris. Thieu is under no illusions about Ky's ambitions, and he probably is aware of Ky's current campaign to convince the US that Prime Minister Huong and other cabinet members ought to be replaced with "strong" people, i.e., Ky and his supporters. Thieu probably believes that as long as his appointee, Ambassador Lam, sticks close to Ky, the vice president will be somewhat restrained from broaching the subject of a cabinet change with President Nixon.

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II. OTHER MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

CUBA

[redacted] the Cubans 3.3(b)(1)

are preparing a "comprehensive" policy to discourage hijackers.

Preliminary agreement has been reached with Mexico on a bi-lateral hijacking treaty, [redacted] 3.3(b)(1)

[redacted] the Cubans will soon issue a declaration which might be used as the basis for other bilateral agreements.

[redacted] 3.3(b)(1)

Havana is still unwilling to work out an agreement with the US except on its own terms.

PANAMA

Colonel Torrijos lost no time in assuring Ambassador Adair that relations between Panama and the US will be much smoother now that Colonel Martinez is out of the way. He also says he plans to release most of the political prisoners now in Panamanian jails--with the possible exception of the Communists.

Martinez and his three associates, meanwhile, arrived in Miami two nights ago. They show no sign so far that they intend to take up their posts on the Inter-American Defense Board, and we understand they are thinking about chartering a plane back to Panama.

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